There's an Endless Road to Rediscover
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/48589768.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
Gen

Fandom:
Batman - All Media Types

Relationship:
Tim Drake & Jason Todd

Characters:
Tim Drake, Jason Todd

Additional Tags:
Brief mention of the others - Freeform, Lazarus Pit Side Effects (DCU), Violence, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Enemies to Brothers, t for language, Whump, Hurt/Comfort

Language:
English

Series:
Part 6 of Mutual Aid, Part 17 of The Returnverse

Collections:
GOOD SOUP {Batfamily Style}, marvelous ;)

Stats:
Published: 2023-07-15 Words: 2,518 Chapters: 1/1

There's an Endless Road to Rediscover

by lurkinglurkerwholurks

Summary

“It’s okay.” The words were whisper-thin, wheezed past the grip Jason had on Tim’s neck. He could feel Tim’s Adam’s apple move as he struggled to swallow, to breathe. “He won’t hurt me.”

——Can be read as a standalone——

Notes

I may change this title later, but right now I like how it nods to two other fics. If you have a better one by the time you get to the end, let me know.

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Sounds Overly Valorous (Sounds Like Penance) by altschmerzes

The shout dissipated but its outline still rang in the air. Jason's chest heaved and he blinked, trying to grasp at the words that had filled the void. He couldn't remember them, too overwhelmed by the acid that had spattered as they burst. His throat ached. The roaring rage had ripped through the muscle on its way out, and he felt rawstung into the meat.

He had forgotten. How had he forgotten how it felt to stumble out of the comedown. To be invincible, powerful, unstoppable, *gone*, the world smeared brilliant green, and then to collapse back into the dingy world of his body to pick up the pieces of whatever had been broken in his absence. How it made him feel sick and turned inside out and confused. He still had the power, that twitchy, unstoppable might, but it was fading fast. What had he done while away?

Every breath hurt as it sucked through his teeth and past those raw muscles. He swallowed, convulsively, with no spit to wet his dry mouth. His hands spasmed, full. Jason blinked again.

Wide blue eyes stared back.

"It's okay." The words were whisper-thin, wheezed past the grip Jason had on Tim's neck. He could feel Tim's Adam's apple move as he struggled to swallow, to breathe. "He won't hurt me."

It felt like Tim had said those words before, flung out like his arm at the rest of the family surrounding them, all frozen in tableau like hostages in an armed standoff. Or maybe they were innocent onlookers; Tim the hostage; Jason the gun, the bomb.

Someone had said his name a moment ago, deep and commanding. Bruce, probably, from where he stood suspended, a dark shadow at the edge of Jason's vision. That his name in Batman's mouth hadn't provoked a reaction until now was a bad sign.

But then, so was Tim Drake's throat in his grip.

"You're not going to hurt me," Tim forced out, and Jason *agreed*, of course he wouldn't, he wouldn't *hurt* Tim, not now, not anymore. But his mouth was dry and sour, and the green was still clinging to the edges, and he could hear *that voice* in the back of his head, and he had his hands around Tim's throat, lifted high enough that Tim had lifted up onto his toes. And Tim was shaking.

Tim was trembling in every muscle, in every inch of him, because he

had held off the entire family from beating Jason into the dirt with the force of his belief, but he didn't believe it himself. How could he? All Jason had to do was squeeze. Twist. Snap. And it's over.

He could. He knew it. They knew it. Tim knew it.

It was enough to free him, the single block pulled from the stack that sent him crumbling. Jason recoiled, dropping Tim and leaping backward like a cat out of the fire.

No one moved but him. He didn't stop, scrambling back and back and back, overturning a tray, a chair, until his muscles could work in forward motion again.

If they reached for him, they didn't catch him. He was on his bike and gone, fear and exhaust curdling the air in his wake.

Tim peered through the window into shadows. All was still inside. He hesitated only for a moment, then rested his palms flat on the glass and pushed up, lifting the pane until there was enough of a gap to slither though headfirst. He walked forward on his hands until his feet cleared the sill, then crouched silently on all fours, listening. Nothing stirred.

He might have made the wrong choice. Not to follow Jason—that was the right choice, no matter how the others had clutched at his arm or frowned worriedly—but to assume this was the right safehouse. Tim knew most of Jason's boltholes by now, but he knew better to assume that he had found them all, or that out of all of them, Jason would go to ground in this one. It was a gut feeling more than anything; a gut feeling and the initial path of Jason's motorcycle's tracker before it had gone dark.

Tim tugged on the string of his hoodie once, a quick reflexive gesture to settle his nerves, then stepped forward. He was careful not to creep, though out of habit he stepped with his weight on the balls of his feet, silent except for the creaking of the warped and weary flooring. If Jason wasn't here, he would check the next safehouse, and the next, until he ran out of options. He hoped Jason hadn't left town entirely. Those months of silence were always the worst for all involved.

He rounded the kitchen island and stopped. Jason sat on the floor next to the fridge, back against the cabinets, a bottle and shot glass on the linoleum beside him. Tim stared down at Jason. Jason stared down at his own hands.

“How much have you had?” Tim asked with a jerk of his chin toward the bottle that Jason wouldn’t see.

Jason shook his head once.

That was a relief. Tim couldn’t recall the last time he had seen Jason drink anything stronger than beer beyond the single, symbolic shot on his 21st. He lacked data on what kind of drunk Jason Todd might turn out to be, though genetic history indicated not a great one. He wished he could see the color of Jason’s eyes.

Setting that thought aside, Tim stepped carefully around Jason. He bent, snagged the full shot glass and whiskey bottle, and set them both on the counter, out of reach. Then he opened the fridge and plucked two Yoo-hoos from the shelf. Stepping back around Jason’s legs, he sat with a soft grunt, deliberately within reach, and placed the glass bottles on the floor between them before twisting one open.

Jason didn’t move, then, reluctantly, picked up the second bottle, opened it, and took a sip. Only then did Tim take a swig of his own drink, grimacing slightly as the cold, overly sugary liquid ran down his throat.

“Are you okay?” Tim asked.

Jason made a noise halfway between angry and sick. “You’re asking me?”

He had been watching Tim out of the corner of his eye and looked away as Tim tipped his head back to drink. Tim wasn’t sure if there was enough light to see the bruising already beginning to appear. He hoped not. But now Jason was glaring at the side of the kitchen island like it was Tim’s head, and Tim still couldn’t see the color of his eyes.

“Yes,” was Tim’s only reply, simple and without heat. When nothing else came, he nudged again, “So? Are you?”

Jason’s hand trembled as he lifted the bottle to his lips for another sip, but Tim didn’t know if that was a physical or emotional symptom. He didn’t understand the physiology of the Pit effects. No one did, except maybe Ra’s, and there was no use trusting any information he might give. Jason wouldn’t allow testing, didn’t like to talk about it except in little hints here and there, mostly leaked when he was feeling low or like he owed someone vulnerability in debt for pain. It wasn’t a trade Tim liked to exploit, curious though he was. But he had pieced some things together over the years from observation and those hushed

confessions, like the disorientation and nausea after, and what Tim suspected was consequences of low blood sugar.

Jason seemed physically intact, at least, as did the apartment. No broken furniture, bullet-riddled walls, or stabbed sofa cushions to deal with. He had spotted Jason's holster, firearm still inside, dropped in a heap by the door, and had left it there. One less weapon to worry about.

"You shouldn't be here," Jason said, instead of answering the twice-posed question.

Tim had a lot of things he wanted to say about that. He didn't and instead shrugged in a careless way designed to irritate just enough. "Am though." He gave Jason's shoulder a nudge and pretended not to notice when the other man flinched. "Hey. I'm fine."

Jason's gaze flicked his way and down. His lip curled in disgust. "Your hands are still shaking." As if his own weren't.

Tim fidgeted with the ring on his right hand, spinning it around and around before tugging his sleeves down over his knuckles, but otherwise didn't rise to the bait. "It happens."

"It *shouldn't*," Jason spat, "have happened."

Maybe. But it had. Jason had been touchy all day, though Tim had initially overlooked and discounted the prickliness as nothing outside the norm. Even once he had begun to notice, it wasn't much cause for concern. They had all earned their bad days. But as the day progressed and Jason's shoulders grew tighter, his answers shorter, and his voice sharper, everyone noticed. And some navigated the tension better than others.

And maybe Tim had gotten a little careless.

"Well, it did," Tim said. "And I'm fine. Are you?"

Jason ran his hands fitfully through his hair and then down his face. "You shouldn't be here." His lip curled, tugging into a snarl that could have been nothing or something, depending. "Bruce shouldn't have let you come."

Tim laughed at that, a genuine bark of surprise and amusement that would have hurt less if it had been fake. "First, Bruce hasn't been able to tell me what to do since… pretty much ever. Second, even if he

could before, I'm an adult, Jay, what's he going to do, ground me? And third…"

Here he took a breath for both of them. "You're not going to hurt me."

"You don't know that!"

He did, but there was no point arguing it right now. Especially because now Jason was looking at him. His eyes were red-rimmed, but clear, cool, and blue, and the knot of nausea in the back of Tim's throat unspooled and disappeared.

"I'm here because I'm worried about how you're doing. Everyone is," Tim said instead.

Jason groaned, likely thinking about the uneasy milling happening back at the Manor and the worried faces he would have to confront later.

Tim bumped Jason's shoulder with his own, and Jason flinched again, but this time a little less. "I shouldn't have crowded you," he offered by way of apology.

Jason scowled at him. "Don't lie to me."

Tim grimaced. Sometimes it took Jason a little longer to remember what had happened in the throes of the Pit. He had been hoping that this was one of those times. Guess not. Still, it wasn't a lie, not really.

"You know what would've happened if you'd grabbed Damian instead," was all he said. Jason's expression, already tortured, twisted into a nauseated wince. Knowing he was picturing disaster in the wrong direction, Tim bumped his shoulder a third time. "He's doing good with his no-stab sticker chart. Didn't want to make him break the streak, you know?"

Jason had curled back in on himself, legs pulled up and arms piled atop his bowed head. Tim suspected his turmoil had less to do with any actual harm done than the circumstances, a suspicion validated when Jason mumbled, "I thought I was fucking better."

Better than the Pit, past the outbursts and the rage. Tim snorted and allowed himself a test lean. Jason went still and stiff, but he didn't pull away, so Tim stayed where he was, shoulder pressed comfortably against his brother's.

“Better and done are two different things,” he said, his voice wryly bitter at having to quote his own least favorite therapy phrase. “Besides. You *are* better.”

Jason made a noise again, that half-strangled, nauseated noise choked with self-loathing and frustration. But it was true. He was better. They both were.

“You’re still fucking shaking,” Jason muttered into his knees.

“Yeah, it’s called a trauma response. I’ve got like five of them, you’re not special,” Tim snapped back, harsher than he intended.

Because yeah, maybe it bothered him that his head could know one thing and his body another. It wasn’t that he didn’t believe Jason was dangerous. He was still Red Hood, after all. He always would be. But they were all dangerous, in their own ways, and he and Jason had years of practice. They were different people than they had been on that awful stormy night when Tim had first crawled through that window. It wasn’t Jason’s fault if Tim’s body reacted before his head or his heart.

It was a tossup how Jason would react to anger. This time, luckily, Tim’s outburst seemed to push the valve on some of his own. The tension leaked slowly out of his frame, deflating like an old balloon until he was leaning against Tim just as much as Tim was leaning into him.

“I’m still… still fucking sorry I…” Jason gestured with one hand at Tim’s neck.

“I know.” Tim fidgeted with his sleeve cuffs again. “I hate collared shirts.” He would have to wear one buttoned all the way until the bruising faded. At least it wasn’t too bad this time.

“Next…” Jason swallowed hard, choking on the word. “Next time. Let B take the hit. Or Dick.”

“They weren’t close enough. Besides, I was fine,” Tim said again.

“You *don’t*—”

“I do,” Tim cut in, before Jason could get too riled.

“*How?*”

“First,” Tim said, and held up his right hand. The metal ring on his finger, the one he’d designed after suffering one too many kidnapping attempts, glinted in the low light. He didn’t know if Jason remembered Tim gripping his wrist with that hand, ready to activate the shock feature. It was bad enough to be kidnapped as minor; being targeted as an adult was a total drag. It felt heightist.

Jason grunted, only somewhat mollified.

“Second, Cass was behind you the whole time,” Tim pointed out with no small portion of vindication.

“Oh.”

“And third,” Tim tipped his head and rested it against Jason’s shoulder. “You already had your chance.” Years of chances, time after time, and Jason never took his shot. “I knew you would stop. And you did.”

“Fine,” Jason at last conceded. “But I’m still sorry. And I’ll, uh. Talk. With Bruce. Figure out what the trigger was this time, so it doesn’t happen next time.”

“Okay.”

“Okay,” Jason echoed and rested his head atop Tim’s.

They sat there together, shoulder to shoulder, sipping on their Yoo-hoos until the bottles were empty and the trembling had calcified into sore hips and backs. Tim stood first, grunting as he arched his back and cracked his wrists, then reached a hand down to pull his brother to his feet.

“Smash Brothers?” Jason asked even as Tim pulled out his phone and sent a quick thumbs-up to Bruce. Bruce would let everyone else know they were fine and not to come knocking.

“Sure,” Tim said, pocketing his phone, then quickly, “Dibs on Mewtwo.”

He twisted, then staggered off-kilter from Jason’s shove to his shoulder and aggrieved “*Fuuuuudge* you.”

He laughed.

End Notes

Inspired by the tagged fic, which is a wonderful Ted Lasso fic with a specific moment that made my brain go "!!!!!" I didn't follow that fic's setup, but it was lovely and I felt like I leaned on it enough to warrant an explicit mention. Also, so good. Did I mention it was a really good fic?

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!